DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 425 656 FL 025 636

AUTHOR	Howard, Elizabeth R.; Loeb, Michael I.
TITLE	In Their Own Words: Two-Way Immersion Teachers Talk about Their Professional Experiences. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-FL-98-14
PUB DATE	1998-12-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	RR93002010
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC/CLL, 4646 40th Street NW, Washington, DC 20016; Web site: http://www.cal.org.ericcll
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Secondary Education; English (Second Language); *Immersion Programs; Interviews; Language Minorities; *Language Teachers; Native Speakers; *Professional Development; Questionnaires; Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Recruitment
IDENTIFIERS	Center for Education Diversity and Excellence; ERIC Digests; *Two Way Bilingual Education

ABSTRACT

The last several years have seen a dramatic increase in the popularity of two-way immersion (TWI) programs around the country. These programs integrate native English speakers and language-minority students for academic instruction and aim to promote bilingual proficiency, high academic achievement, and cross-cultural awareness. The expanded popularity of these programs has meant a surge in the demand for and recruitment of TWI teachers. Thus far, there is little research documenting the teaching experiences or professional development needs of current teachers in this unique teaching environment. Research on TWI being conducted at the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) under the auspices of the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, & Excellence (CREDE) is investigating the professional development of TWI teachers. An important premise of the investigation is the belief that questions about how to prepare teachers to work in TWI settings are best answered by teachers themselves. For this reason interviews and questionnaires were used to elicit teachers' perspectives and to gain demographic information about this understudied population. The interviews and questionnaires elicited information on who the teachers are (e.g., native language, highest level of education), on their professional experiences, and on what they thought new TWI teachers should know. (Author/VWL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ERIC®
CLEARINGHOUSE ON LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS
CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Digest

December 1998

(EDO-FL-98-14)

In Their Own Words: Two-Way Immersion Teachers Talk About Their Professional Experiences

Elizabeth R. Howard and Michael I. Loeb, Center for Applied Linguistics

ED 425 656

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC®
CLEARINGHOUSE ON LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS
CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Digest

December 1998

(EDO-FL-98-14)

In Their Own Words: Two-Way Immersion Teachers Talk About Their Professional Experiences

Elizabeth R. Howard and Michael I. Loeb, Center for Applied Linguistics

The last several years have seen a dramatic increase in the popularity of two-way immersion (TWI) programs around the country, from 30 programs in 1987 to 225 programs in 1998 (McCargo & Christian, 1998). These programs integrate native English speakers and language-minority students for academic instruction and aim to promote bilingual proficiency, high academic achievement, and cross-cultural awareness in all students (Christian, 1994). The expanded popularity of these programs has meant a surge in the demand for and recruitment of TWI teachers. At the same time, there is very little research documenting the teaching experiences or professional development needs of current teachers in this unique teaching environment. Without this type of documentation, it is difficult to know which types of pre-service and in-service professional development activities will best prepare teachers to work effectively in TWI programs.

One study conducted specifically with TWI teachers describes a professional development project in El Paso, Texas, that utilized peer ethnography to foster reflective practice among 24 team-teachers in two TWI programs (Calderón, 1995). As a result of ongoing participation in this action research study, teachers reported improved collaboration with team members, improved dual-language teaching skills, renewed enthusiasm for teaching, and interest in pursuing graduate degrees. A related study investigating the self-reported professional development needs of French immersion teachers (Day & Shapson, 1996) found that, by far, workshops were the prevalent form of in-service professional development, and that French language arts and curriculum and materials development were teachers' top priorities. These studies are useful in that they initiate a dialogue on the professional development needs and practices of teachers in immersion settings.

Because TWI programs are increasingly popular but not well studied as teaching environments, it is important to continue this dialogue in a way that targets the specific professional demands of TWI teachers. Like all teachers who work in programs that facilitate second language acquisition, TWI teachers must constantly strive to integrate language and content objectives in every lesson. What makes the task of the TWI teacher distinct, however, is that at all times, regardless of the language of instruction, they are asked to deliver instruction to integrated groups of native speakers and second language learners. Therefore, they must always be mindful of ways to make the content comprehensible to the nonnative speakers, while still making the lessons stimulating and challenging to the native speakers. Likewise, because of the integrated nature of the programs, TWI teachers need to possess strong interpersonal skills that allow them to function well in cross-cultural environments. Not only do TWI teachers need to be able to promote positive cross-cultural relationships among students in their classes, they also need to be able to work effectively with other staff members and parents from both cultural groups.

Research on TWI being conducted at the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) under the auspices of the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE) is investigating the professional development of TWI teachers. An important premise of the investigation is the belief that questions about how to prepare teachers to work in TWI settings are best answered by teachers themselves. For this reason, interviews and questionnaires were used to elicit teachers' perspectives and to gain demographic information about this understudied population. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight elementary TWI teachers from various programs across the country, and their responses were used to formulate a professional development needs assessment questionnaire that was distributed to 181 pre-K-8 classroom teachers in 12 TWI programs. Findings from the interviews and questionnaires are presented below.

Demographic Findings: Who Are the Teachers?

Not surprisingly, the 181 TWI teachers involved in this study are overwhelmingly female (86%). As a group, they are relatively new to teaching. This contrasts sharply with the national picture in public education. According to the most recent demographic information, only 33% of public school K-12 teachers have been teaching for 10 years or less (Henke et. al, 1997). Due to the relatively recent emergence of most two-way programs, few teachers (30%) report having taught in TWI programs for more than 5 years. With regard to native language, 38% are native Spanish speakers, 45% are native English speakers, and 16% are native bilinguals (speakers of both English and Spanish from age 3 or earlier). In other words, over 50% of the teaching staff in these 12 TWI programs reported growing up speaking Spanish. This mirrors the student populations in these programs, which are composed of approximately 50% native Spanish speakers. Moreover, this pattern indicates a much greater balance than the national situation in public elementary schools, in which the majority of all teachers are White (non-Hispanic), and there are about three times as many Latino students as Latino teachers (12% vs. 4%) (Henke et. al, 1997). With regard to educational background, a sizeable majority have either advanced degrees or credits toward them, with 41% holding master's degrees and another 28% currently involved in graduate studies. Finally, over half of the teachers hold bilingual certificates or credentials. Although the teachers in this sample are fairly new to teaching, they are well educated, have appropriate credentials, and are well-matched to the student populations of TWI programs.

TWI Teachers Reflect on Their Professional Experiences

Benefits. Many teachers cited the opportunity for fairness that two-way immersion education can provide as a major benefit. Because TWI can put all students on an equal level, it gives them an equal chance to broaden their horizons and an equal opportunity to learn from and teach one another. According to one second grade teacher, "For native Spanish speaking students, TWI can be a chance to have Spanish language and culture validated and can potentially raise students' self esteem by giving them the experience of being the ones in the know." The teachers interviewed felt that these students also seemed to learn English faster and were less likely to "fall through the cracks," and that there was an increased likelihood of school involvement by their parents.

Professional benefits that teachers reported were the increased autonomy, challenge, and excitement of creating new curricula and

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

assessment tools, team teaching, and the opportunity to use Spanish.

Challenges. The eight teachers reported many challenges. First, because everything is done in two languages, TWI is inherently more labor intensive. Many materials must be developed from scratch, and in programs that alternate teachers for Spanish and English instruction, teachers have "twice as many students in half as much time."

The teachers also reported multiple challenges in working with parents in TWI programs. Specifically, the need to help parents understand that second language (L2) acquisition is a slow process and that the program has cross-cultural goals as well as linguistic and academic goals were cited as issues.

Linguistic challenges were cited, such as teaching content information through the L2, distinguishing special needs from the L2 acquisition process, easing the frustration of primary grade students who do not understand the language, and promoting Spanish language use among all students.

Administrative challenges mentioned were tensions between the two-way program and the general education program within schools and between the two-way programs and the central administration at the district level. Scheduling, working with a partner teacher, and disagreements among staff regarding program features were concerns voiced by one fourth-grade teacher: "There's been a lot of, with the staff, a lot of debate over how much they believe in this model. So there's been a lot of people, particularly native Spanish speakers, who think maybe 90-10 isn't maybe the greatest thing to be doing . . . And that's been a big debate in our school. Trying to make sure we have a uniform philosophy."

Suggestions. Respondents were invited to recommend ways in which schools and districts could facilitate the work of two-way teachers. Foremost among teacher concerns was finding qualified and skilled teachers and offering them substantive training. As one second-grade teacher stated, "You cannot throw a teacher into a classroom and tell her to teach the curriculum if she doesn't have the techniques or knowledge . . . I'm thrilled about the idea that this program is opening up and giving me a big chance. But I do feel there's a lack of time for searching for people that are competent, or training people to be competent in the field, or there just aren't enough people."

Nearly all respondents agreed that more training and professional development would go a long way to help overcome these challenges. Beyond a general call for more comprehensive and ongoing teacher training, teachers suggested a number of ways that administrators could better support TWI programs and teachers. Suggestions included the following: 1) paying mentor teachers to aid new teachers and prepare curricula; 2) giving both novice and veteran teachers more direction and materials; and 3) extending the period of apprenticeship for student teachers. Coupled with this desire for more curriculum assistance for new teachers was a hope for an increase in the availability of quality teaching materials, particularly in the minority language, for teachers at all grade levels.

Several teachers recommended hiring a bilingual coordinator and parent liaison at the school or district level. In addition to recommending greater use of parent outreach coordinators, teachers made it clear that hiring administrators and support staff who are bilingual and support the goals of TWI "would make an enormous difference." Teachers also expressed concern about the frequent lack of TWI representation on school-wide and district-wide committees. Within the school, teachers cited the need for positive cross-cultural attitudes among all school staff, and recommended conducting staff meetings in Spanish as well as in English to allow for more input from Spanish-dominant staff. In broader terms, teachers felt that the two-way context, more than the traditional elementary context, demands a fully coordinated faculty, both logistically and ideologically.

What New Teachers Should Know

All of the teachers were eager to share their experiences and insights in the form of advice for new and prospective teachers. They suggested that new teachers become very familiar with the structure and goals of the program. A second-grade teacher made the point that "in the two-way immersion program specifically, I think they need to understand what it's about, what are the goals of the program. They have to believe in the program, they have to believe in bilingual education . . . you really need to believe that, you really need to believe it is important to learn other languages and to learn other cultures."

This orientation to the program should also include background information on the school—its mission and history—and a real understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of immersion. Along with this program-level knowledge, teachers stressed the importance of having well-developed teaching knowledge. Specifically, new two-way teachers should possess subject matter competence, be familiar with the grade-level curriculum and have appropriate expectations, be prepared with a wide array of effective teaching practices, and be firm in the underlying belief that all students can learn and succeed.

Teachers also spoke about cross-cultural and linguistic knowledge that would be important for new teachers to possess, much of it unique to the TWI context. A basic familiarity with the two cultures and languages involved in the program is key, as is having some ideas about how to work with the two groups of parents. For one fourth-grade teacher, the increased demands placed on teachers by parents in TWI programs deserve extra consideration.

Other issues teachers raised were considering how to elevate the status of the language-minority students in an integrated setting and becoming familiar with the differences across the two languages, such as conventions of punctuation and capitalization.

The singularity of the TWI context implies a special set of challenges for even the most experienced teacher, yet demographics suggest that many of the teachers involved are relative newcomers. As TWI programs mature, it will become more important and more feasible to take advantage of the collective wisdom of more experienced teachers.

Conclusion

The eight teachers interviewed for this study work in different programs with different populations and often very different ways of reaching their goals. Yet, there was considerable overlap in what they viewed as the benefits and challenges of being a TWI teacher, their thoughts on how schools and districts could help them meet these challenges, and their advice for new teachers. Hopefully, the opinions expressed in these interviews and the demographic trends brought forth by the questionnaires will enhance appreciation for the deft and complex work that these professionals do and the qualifications that they possess. Further, they should serve as a stimulus for more investigation and, ultimately, for change in the way two-way immersion teachers are prepared and supported.

References

Calderón, M. (1995). *Dual language programs and team-teachers' professional development.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Research Association.

Christian, D. (1994). *Two-way bilingual education: Students learning through two languages.* Educational Practice Report: 12. Santa Cruz, CA and Washington, DC: National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning.

Day, E. & Shapson, S. (1996). *Studies in immersion education.* Multilingual Matters.

Henke, R.R., Choy, S. P. ,Chen, X., Geis, S., Alt, N. M., Broughman, S. (1997). *America's teachers: Profile of a profession, 1993-4.* NCES 97-460. Washington, DC: Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

McCargo, C. & Christian, D. (1998). *Two-way bilingual immersion programs in the United States: 1997-1998 supplement.* Santa Cruz, CA and Washington, DC: Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence.

This report was prepared with funding from the Dept. of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Library of Education, under contract no. RR93002010. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of ED, OERI, or

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC CLL • 800-276-9834 • email: eric@cal.org • http://www.cal.org/ericcll